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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

38th meeting
Strasbourg, 27-30 November 2018

**REPORT OF THE 9TH MEETING OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS
ON PROTECTED AREAS AND ECOLOGICAL NETWORKS**

*Document prepared by
the Directorate of Democratic Participation*

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1. Opening of the meeting

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming the participants and thanked the Secretariat for the preparation of the working documents.

The Secretariat welcomed the participants and reiterated its gratitude to the Serbian authorities for hosting the 8th meeting of the Group of Experts for Protected Areas and Ecological Networks in Belgrade in 2017. The meeting was very fruitful and delivered significant outcomes in particular regarding the reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012).

The Secretariat stressed the importance of the work of the Group of Experts as it oversees the methodology and the guidance of the reporting on the conservation status of species and habitats. Contracting Parties should actively engage in the reporting process to reach positive results in order and demonstrate their commitment to contribute to the pan-European assessment of biological diversity conservation.

2. Adoption of the agenda

The Agenda was adopted as it appears in Appendix I.

3. Mandate of the Group and decisions of the 37th meeting of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention

The Secretariat recalled the main decisions taken at the 8th meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks endorsed by the 37th meeting of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention regarding the reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012), the concept of ecological character and the formal adoption of Emerald Network sites from Norway and Georgia.

4. Reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012)

4.a Reporting tool

The Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks agreed in 2017 on the development of a reporting tool adapted from the tool created for the reporting under Nature Directives.

Specificities and differences of the reporting tool under Resolution No. 8 (2012) compared to the tool developed for the reporting under Article 17 of the Habitats Directive were assessed. The reporting tool under Resolution No. 8 (2012) will be based on MS Access and the database structure of the Article 17 tool will be amended in order to merge bird species with other species. The look up tables will be revised so as to consider the country list, the species and habitat lists relevant to the reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012).

Contacts are on-going with the company in charge of EU's tool. Unfortunately the project is not as advanced as expected and the Secretariat fears some delays with the delivery of the tool. This should however not be seen as an obstacle as Parties will have the possibility to deliver their reports until the end of 2019. In case of unexpected delays with the delivery of the tool, Contracting Parties will be using the spreadsheets reflecting the reporting format prepared for the training workshops on reporting for drafting their reports.

4.b Reporting Reference Portal

The Secretariat presented the brand new Reference Portal dedicated to the reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012). The [Reporting Reference Portal](#) brings together the reference texts, legal texts, guidance and technical resources to assist Parties in the reporting exercise. The Secretariat especially focused on:

Helpdesk: A helpdesk will be available for assisting Parties at following address: Helpdesk.reporting-bernconvention@coe.int

Reporting format: The Group of Experts discussed and agreed on the [reporting format](#) last year in Belgrade. The document approved last year was slightly revised as some mistakes and omissions were spotted. Contracting Parties are invited to use the format now available from the Reporting Reference Portal.

Reporting guidelines part 1: In 2017 the Group of Experts agreed on the first part of the reporting guidelines entitled “[The report format field-by-field guidance](#)”. This document was also slightly revised in order to reflect the changes made to the reporting format and to correct some inconsistencies. While the document does not need to be discussed again Contracting Parties are invited to use the version of the guidelines available from the Reporting Reference Portal.

The representative from Ukraine informed the Group that the first part of the guidelines was translated into national language and shared with scientists.

Reporting guidelines part 2: The Secretariat has drafted a complementary part of the guidelines entitled “[Definitions and Methods](#)” which is to be used in parallel of the part 1 adopted last year. The document examines more in detail what to report in the tool and how to gather and process relevant data. The draft document was already shared with all Contracting Parties end of July in order to leave them sufficient time to comment it.

Contracting Parties welcomed the second part of the guidelines and proposed to provide comments after using it.

The second part of the reporting guidelines “Definitions and methods” was agreed on by the Group of Experts subject to the reflection of possible comments at a later stage.

The Secretariat will add to the Reporting Reference Portal a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section to ensure that comments, suggestions, and questions regarding the reporting, its tool and its supporting documents are available to all Contracting Parties and observer States.

Checklists for species, for habitats and proposal of population units: The Group of Experts agreed in 2017 to report on the conservation status of a subset species and habitats issued from the Resolutions No. 4 (1996) and No. 6 (1998) and well represented in the non-EU Contracting Parties.

The tables available in the tabs of the Excel file referenced [TPVS/PA \(2018\)5](#), indicate in which countries and biogeographical regions the features are present and a report is expected to be sent by the end of 2019. The lists of species, habitats and birds were created using the 2016 consolidated conclusions of the Emerald biogeographical evaluation seminars.

The lists consider all countries involved in the biogeographical evaluation seminars, including the South East European Parties, Norway and Switzerland. For countries, not yet involved in the biogeographical process, additional work is needed to identify and agree upon which species and habitats occur in which biogeographical regions in those countries (e.g. Andorra, Iceland, Turkey, etc ...).

The checklists were shared with all Parties end of July to get their feedback. While it is assumed that the checklists reflect the reality of the occurrence of the features in the concerned countries, the Group of Experts suggested that in the case the latest data available contradict the information of the checklists Parties will report that the feature is not present on their territory.

The checklists for species, habitats and birds as well as the population units were agreed on by the Group of Experts. Andorra and Iceland will cross-check the occurrence of the features listed in the subset of species and habitats selected for the reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012) and provide their feedback by 25 October 2018.

Typical species: In addition to the checklists for species and habitats the Secretariat also made available from the Reporting Reference Portal, a [template for defining the typical species](#) – i.e. the species which are typical of a given habitat and which contribute to the assessment of its conservation status. The table should be completed with the list of typical species of a given habitat and supplied together with the report on the habitat concerned.

List of pressures and threats and list of conservation measures: The reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012) intends to complement the reporting under Nature Directives carried out by the EU member States in order to assess the conservation status of species and habitats at pan-European level. In this respect, the Secretariat has been trying to adapt to the specificities of the Bern Convention the tools, reference documents, and guidance developed by the EU for the reporting under Nature Directives. In the case of the [threats and pressures](#) and of the [conservation measures](#), the Secretariat proposed to use the same lists as the EU.

Threats and pressures are structured along 13 categories. The conservation measures aim to tackle the threats and pressures and are structured according to the same categories.

Both lists were shared with all Parties end of July for feedback.

Contracting Parties welcomed the proposal of the Secretariat to use the same the lists of threats and pressures and of conservation measures as the EU in order to ensure consistency with the reporting under Nature Directives.

The list of threats and pressures and list of conservation measures were agreed on by the Group of Experts

Distribution maps: The Group of Experts agreed in 2017 on the use of a pan-European projection grid for the creation of the distribution maps within the framework of the reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012). The Secretariat informed the Group of Experts that the [grids](#) for all Contracting Parties and the Russian Federation are available from the Reporting Reference Portal and that [guidelines](#) on how to transfer national distribution maps into the pan-European map were also drafted and made available.

Range tool: The Range tool was developed by the European Environment Agency for EU member States reporting under Nature Directives. The natural range describes roughly the spatial limits within which the habitat or species occurs. The tool will be compatible with the reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012) and non-EU Contracting Parties. The tool will be presented at the second training workshop on reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012) on 8 November 2018 in Paris.

4.c Emerald Network Reference Portal

As part of the preparation of the reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012), it was necessary to take stock of the existing material and documentation available for the reporting purposes in the light of the reporting format and both parts of the reporting guidelines. As many of the missing resources were also relevant for the Emerald Network, the Secretariat reviewed the existing Emerald Reference Portal following the structure of the Standard Data Form. The exercise led to a brand new [Reference Portal for the Emerald Network](#).

Among the new resources now available from the Emerald Network Reference Portal, the Secretariat drew the attention of the Group of Experts to:

The ISO country codes: the [codes](#) were not available from the previous reference portal although they are used in the Standard Data Forms and in the reporting format. The codes of all Contracting Parties and observer States are now listed in the Emerald Network Reference Portal.

Marine Regions: The Secretariat intends to make available from the Emerald Network Reference Portal a map of marine regions. The map will support the designation of marine Emerald Network sites and enable the evaluation of their sufficiency.

The proposed map of marine regions was extensively discussed under item 5.c of the agenda.

Administrative regions: For EU Member States, Eurostat has developed a standard hierarchical coding system for the regions of the European Union to reference statistical data. For non-EU countries [an equivalent coding system](#) was developed in close collaboration with the national project teams involved in the implementation of the Emerald Network. Contracting Parties were asked end of July to review their list of administrative regions but the Secretariat did not receive any update.

The representative of Norway informed the Group of Experts that there were recent changes in the administrative regions of his country and that he will provide the Secretariat with an update.

The Group of Experts agreed on the revision of the Administrative Regions on a continuous flow basis

Code lists for species: The species listed in Resolution No. 6 (1998) are given codes in the Emerald Network tool (the so-called SDF manager). While it would be easy to add a column of codes in the Resolution No. 6 (1998), the resulting code list would not reflect the existing code list of the Emerald Network tool as since the adoption of the Resolution taxonomic evolvments were reflected into the tool.

The Secretariat is therefore still in discussion with the European Topic Center on Biological Diversity for resolving this issue. The code list for species will be available soon.

Code lists for habitats: At the contrary of Resolution No. 6 (1998), the codes for the habitats listed in Resolution No. 4 (1996) are already present in the Resolution.

Habitat classes: 27 broad habitat classes were identified to describe the general site character.

Threats and pressures: the [list of threats and pressures](#) which was already agreed on by the Group of Experts under item 4.b is also made available from the Emerald Network Reference Portal and should be considered when filling in the Emerald Network Standard Data Form.

List of national designation types: The national designation type is one criterion for documenting Emerald Network sites in the Standard Data Form.

As part of the cooperation with the European Environment Agency (EEA) within the framework of the ENI SEIS EAST II project targeting the Eastern Partnership countries, the Secretariat has initiated a revision process of the national designation types of the 6 Eastern Partnership countries. The [table](#) available from the Emerald Network Reference Portal reflects the recent input of 5 out of the 6 countries. The Secretariat proposed to extend the revision of the national designations to all the Parties and observer States implementing the Emerald Network in order to get an up-to-date list of national designations. The aim of this revision is to ensure consistency with the data delivered by Parties to the Common Database of Designated Areas (CDDA) and to the World Database of Protected Areas (WDPA).

As a second step, Parties will be invited to update their Standard Data Forms according the revised list of national designations.

The Group of Experts agreed on the revision of the national designations to ensure consistency with the CDDA and WDPA.

Guidelines for filling in the SDF: these [guidelines](#) address a longstanding gap in the documentation related to the Emerald Network. They explain step by step and field by field how to fill in the Emerald Network Standard Data Form and to submit it to the Central Data Repository (CDR) managed by the EEA.

5. Development of the Emerald Network guidance

5.a Guidance describing the ecological character of Emerald Network sites

The concept of the “ecological character” of Emerald Network sites was introduced to the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks last year as there is actually a gap in the guidance of the Bern Convention. The Standing Committee at its 37th meeting welcomed the initiative as it aims to support the implementation of existing provisions and gave the Secretariat the mandate to develop appropriate guidance describing the ecological character of Emerald Network sites and to review the Bern Convention case files that relate to the change of ecological character of Emerald Network sites with a view to identify the successful responses and define good practices for detecting, reporting, assessing and responding to changes.

Dave Pritchard presented to the Group of Experts the draft [guidance](#) on detecting, reporting, assessing and responding to changes in the ecological character of Emerald Network sites consisting in 15 guidelines. These guidelines provide a logical outline of elements to consider, and steps that can usefully be followed to design and operate a scheme aiming to detect, report, assess and respond to changes or likely changes of the ecological character of Emerald Network sites.

While Contracting Parties welcomed the draft guidance document, many of them felt that they would need more time to assess how the guidelines would apply concretely in their respective contexts. Some Parties such as Ukraine for example are more advanced than others towards the management of the Emerald Network sites but for many countries the setting up of a monitoring scheme of the ecological character is felt as premature.

The Secretariat recalled that the guidelines are aimed to help Contracting Parties implement the provisions of Resolution No. 5 (1998) and not create additional obligations for them. When drafting the guidelines it became obvious that they should be considered by Parties as an additional resource for managing their Emerald Network sites, defining conservation objectives and monitoring their sites.

It is also believed that the guidelines could become a reference document for the Bureau of the Standing Committee when examining complaints or case files relating to Emerald Network sites on which to lean on its decisions.

The Group of Experts agreed on the guidance document on the Ecological Character of Emerald Network sites and attached the following recommendations:

- The guidance should be tested by Ukraine on a case file relating to the Emerald Network;
- National experts should provide feedback on the extent to which the guidelines can be put into practice;
- The Bureau of the Standing Committee should assess the relevance of the guidance when examining a sample of complaints/case files relating to the Emerald Network.

5.b Proposals of additional species to Resolution No. 6 (1998) and/or habitats to Resolution No. 4 (1996) and follow up on previously proposed additional habitats to Resolution No. 4 (1996)

Most of Contracting Parties have already benefited from a biogeographical evaluation to assess the extent to which their list of Emerald Network sites meets the objective of the network. Not many countries can prevail having a network ensuring a favourable conservation of the species and habitats for which they have the responsibility on their territory. It is acknowledged that the sufficiency of the Emerald Network would be improved if the species and habitats listed respectively in the Resolutions No. 6 (1998) and No. 4 (1996) would be complemented with features predominantly present in Eastern Europe.

Resulting from statements from experts and scientists from Albania, Georgia, the Russian Federation and Ukraine there seem to be clear opportunities to introduce proposals for the possible revision of the EUNIS habitat classification and of the Resolution No. 4 (1996). Although the Secretariat invited the Focal Points to the Bern Convention of the above mentioned Parties to proceed with the new proposals of additions, only Ukraine replied positively.

For the records, the deadline for the submission of proposals is set on 1st July of each year, using the Information Form adopted for this purpose by the Standing Committee in 2010, in order to allow the assessment of the proposals before the annual meeting of the Group of Experts in September.

Ukraine proposed to add four habitats to Resolution No. 4 (1996):

- *Depressions (pody) of the Steppe zone*
- *Pine forests on chalk*
- *Pistacia mutica woodland*
- *Mud volcanoes*

whose relevance was assessed by the European Topic Center on Biological Diversity (ETC/BD) (see document [T-PVS/PA\(2018\)7](#))

The recommendation of the ETC/BD reads as follows:

- To add *Depressions (pody) of the Steppe zone* as a new habitat complex to the EUNIS habitats classification and to the Resolution No. 4 (1996).
- To revise the description of the habitat type “G3.4E Ponto-Caucasian *Pinus sylvestris* forests” of the Interpretation Manual such that it clearly covers the vegetation described in the proposal as *Pine forests on chalk*, possibly by making the EUNIS habitat equal to the order *Pinetalia pallasianae-kochianae*.
- *Pistacia mutica woodland* appears to be already covered by the habitat type the “G1.7 Thermophilous deciduous woodland” but the Interpretation Manual could be revised to better cover the many subtypes.
- *Mud volcanoes* are part of the habitat type “H6.1 Active volcanic features” so are already included in Resolution No. 4 (1996) but this could be made more explicit by revising the Interpretation Manual accordingly.

The representative of Ukraine welcomed the recommendations from the ETC/BD. The representative from the Russian Federation raised concern regarding the recommendation on *Pine forests on chalk* and rather suggested it becomes a new habitat type. The Group of Experts agreed that he would consult with national experts and liaise bilaterally with the representative of Ukraine before a decision is made.

The Secretariat also informed the Group of Experts on the progress in the discussions with Norway and Switzerland regarding the proposal of Switzerland in 2014 to add two habitat types (“C3.2 Water fringing reedbeds and tall helophytes other than canes” and “G1.41 *Alnus* Swamp Woods not on acid peat”) to the Resolution No. 4 (1996). A consensus could be found and the endorsement of both habitat types could finally be considered by the Standing Committee at its 38th meeting.

The representative of Norway raised his concern regarding the continuous update process of the lists of species and habitats under Resolutions No. 6 (1998) and No. 4 (1996) as it forces Parties which already have an established Emerald Network to verify the occurrence of the added species/habitats in their Emerald Network sites. This continuous resource and time consuming revision process is slowing down the setting up of the network and affects negatively the sufficiency of the list of Emerald Network sites of certain Parties. Norway wished that the review process of the species and habitats listed respectively in Resolutions No. 6 (1998) and No. 4 (1996) is put on hold until the Emerald Network has reached a level of sufficiency enabling Contracting Parties to allocate staff and resources to the conservation of habitats for species not yet encompassed in the Resolutions.

The Group of Experts agreed on the amendment of Resolution No. 4 (1996) so as to include the complex habitat *Depressions (pody) of the Steppe zone* and on the revision of the interpretation manual of habitats so as to encompass the description of *Pistacia mutica woodland* and *Mud volcanoes*. The Russian Federation will cross-check whether the proposal of *Pine forests on chalk* should not become an additional habitat although the recommendation of the ETC/BD is to amend the interpretation manual so as to cover its description more clearly.

The Group of Experts also agreed on the revision of Resolution No. 4 (1996) so as to include the habitats *C3.2 Water fringing reedbeds and tall helophytes other than canes* and *G1.41 Alnus Swamp Woods not on acid peat* proposed by Switzerland in 2014.

The Annex I of Resolution No. 4 (1996) amended as agreed by the Group of Experts will be submitted to the 38th Standing Committee to the Bern Convention for formal endorsement.

Finally the Group of Experts mandated the Secretariat to propose a mechanism to control the addition of new species and/or habitat to the Resolutions No. 6 (1998) and No. 4 (1996) as long as the Emerald Network does not reach an adequate level of sufficiency for the species and habitats already considered in the Resolutions.

5.c Marine regions

There is a momentum for introducing the discussions about marine regions within the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks:

- The Emerald biogeographical seminar for South Caucasus held in Tbilisi in November 2017 and which focused on all species except birds has shown that some species assessed for coastal sites should also be considered for marine sites in the Black Sea marine region
- The Brexit could lead to the transfer of UK’s Natura 2000 sites to Emerald Network sites and for the very first time there will be marine Emerald Network sites. As many EU countries have focused on marine Natura 2000 sites these last years it not excluded that UK will continue to propose marine sites in the future. Therefore marine regions should be in place in order to enable the assessment of the sufficiency of these sites. It is also assumed that UK will create an impetus for other Contracting Parties to designate marine sites.
- The Contracting Parties to the Bern Convention will report for the first time on the conservation status of species and habitats over the period 2013 - 2018. For this first exercise marine species/habitats will not be considered but the second reporting cycle in six years’ time might focus also on marine features.

In consultation with the European Environment Agency and its Topic Center on Biological Diversity, the Secretariat has prepared a [proposal of marine regions](#) relevant for the Bern Convention grounded on the marine regions agreed on by EU member States within the framework of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

The Secretariat pointed out that the purpose of the marine regions is exclusively for the designation of marine Emerald Network sites and their sufficiency assessment and for the reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012). The following disclaimer will accompany the use the map of map regions whenever it is used:

The map serves as a working tool only and shall not be considered as an official and legally-binding map representing marine boarders in accordance with international law. This map shall be used without prejudice to the agreements that will be concluded between Contracting Parties or between Parties and non-Parties in respect of their marine boarders.

Parties welcomed the proposed map of marine regions as it reflects what is in force within the EU and also in other frameworks. The representative of Iceland stated there were no objections on this map from the scientific point of view and stressed the importance of the disclaimer. The representative of the Russian Federation supported the delineation of the Arctic marine region proposed. The representative of Norway recalled that there are many definitions for the Arctic border which are not all meaningful from the biological point of view. More time would be needed for internal consultation and to submit possible comments.

The Group of Experts agreed on the proposed map of marine regions subject to Iceland's and Norway's further comments until 19 October and to transmit the map proposed to the 38th Standing Committee to the Bern Convention for formal endorsement.

5.d Resources for the management of Natura 2000 sites

In 2017 the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks discussed in working groups the Three Dimensional Road Map for achieving a fully operational Emerald Network in 7 countries of central and eastern European regions which resulted from the implementation of two 2 joint programmes with the EU in the Eastern Partnership and the Russian Federation. One transversal outcome of the working group sessions was that the Parties were lacking on guidelines for the management of their Emerald Network sites.

To meet the request of Parties, the Secretariat assessed the existing resources regarding the management of protected areas. Its conclusion was that extensive guidance was already produced by the European Commission for Natura 2000. The Secretariat decided to make these resources available to Contracting Parties and designed a new dedicated [webpage](#) for this purpose.

The webpage brings together the reference texts of the Bern Convention dealing with management and the guidelines from the European Commission. It is structured along guidance resources which are split into general and sector specific resources and good practices examples including management models and fact sheets.

The Secretariat informed the Group of Experts that this webpage was also aimed to host guidance or management resources developed by Parties themselves subject they are available in English.

6. State of play of the Emerald Network and future perspectives - Reports by Contracting Parties and list of Emerald Network candidate and adopted sites.

Activities implemented to support the Emerald Network development

The Secretariat reported to the Group of Experts on the activities supporting the implementation of the Emerald Network carried out since September 2017.

- Two biogeographical evaluation seminars were organised with the support from the European Environment Agency within the framework of the ENI SEIS EAST II project funded by the EU. The first took place in Tbilisi from 8-9 November 2017, involved Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia and focused on all species (except birds) and habitats. The second, held in Kiev from 23 to 24 May 2018, involved Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine and focused on bird species. Both seminars produced very positive outcomes in terms of sufficiency improvements for a majority of countries but also in terms of cooperation between national authorities and NGOs for the preparation of the seminars, particularly in Ukraine.

- Resulting from a second visit to Andorra and meetings with the Ministry of the Environment, Agriculture and Sustainability and representatives of local authorities two Emerald Network sites could be proposed before the end of 2018.
- The Emerald Network Reference Portal was redesigned and further developed in parallel of the creation of the Reporting Reference Portal so as to make available the resources referred to in the reporting format and in both parts of reporting guidelines.
- As a follow up on the meeting with South East European countries at the margins of the Group of Experts in Belgrade in 2017, the Secretariat also proposed technical and scientific assistance to Montenegro and Serbia for revising and updating their national databases in the light of the conclusions of the biogeographical evaluation seminar of 2011 and of the data collected within the framework of the projects funded by the EU on Natura 2000.

Contracting Parties were required to report in writing on the implementation of the Emerald Network calendar ahead of the Group of Experts. Unfortunately only 5 countries supplied the Secretariat with an update on their actions for setting up and developing the Emerald Network and 2 others just the day before the meeting. The reports can be seen in the document [T-PVS/PA\(2018\)17](#).

Parties which did not report in writing had the opportunity to take the floor to briefly inform their peers on the development of the Emerald Network in their countries. South East European countries remain focused on the development of Natura 2000 as they benefit from financial support from the European Commission. They made clear that commitments regarding the Emerald Network disconnected from the implementation of the Natura 2000 might not be achievable and sought for the support of the Secretariat of the Bern Convention for ensuring consistency between both networks.

The Secretariat welcomed very much the information received from Andorra, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova to respectively propose and formally adopt Emerald Network sites. The Secretariat recalled that Parties should formally request for nomination as candidate and adopted Emerald Network sites and the supply the related lists of sites not later than 1st November.

Consolidated sufficiency conclusions and progress of the sufficiency

Marc Roekaerts presented the [consolidated sufficiency conclusions](#) to the Group of Experts which are based on the final conclusions of each evaluation seminar and reflect the most recent conclusion for each feature. The consolidated sufficiency conclusions will be updated on a regular basis so as to integrate the latest conclusions available. The consolidated sufficiency conclusions are available in two formats from the [webpage](#) dedicated to the conclusions of the biogeographical evaluation seminars.

Drawn on the consolidated sufficiency conclusions, the [progress of the sufficiency of the Emerald Network](#) was presented to the Group of Experts by Otars Opermanis. Resulting from his interpretation and analysis the sufficiency substantially increased in Armenia, Belarus, and the Republic of Moldova and slightly increased in Ukraine and Azerbaijan. The sufficiency also slightly decreased in Georgia not only because of the significant size reduction of areas but also because of the consideration of many new habitat types in the country.

To measure the progress achieved by each Party one can compare the rate of sufficient conclusions with the rate of all other conclusions. But this approach does not reflect objectively the progress as it considers only the conclusions which are sufficient and excludes the positive or negative evolvement of the conclusions which are not yet sufficient. Therefore an innovative scoring system was proposed to value the positive and negative trends of the conclusions. The balance between the positive trends and negative trends shows the actual progress towards sufficiency.

Contracting Parties welcomed the presentation of the consolidated conclusions and its analysis. Statistics are important for raising decision makers' attention and for setting priorities at national level.

Implementation of the Emerald Network calendar

In terms of progress for setting up and developing the Emerald Network, the Secretariat assessed [the state of implementation of the Emerald Network calendar](#). For the records, according to the calendar, the Emerald Network should be operational in 2020 which means that all Contracting Parties should have Emerald Network sites and that the network is in capacity to ensure a favourable conservation status of the species and habitats listed respectively in the Resolutions No. 6 (1998) and No. 4 (1996).

While the evolvement of the sufficiency shows significant progress, the assessment reveals that the major obstacles as of today to the functionality of the Network are as follows:

- Several countries have not begun to implement the Emerald Network ;
- Many Parties are not committed to nominate their Emerald Network sites as Areas of Special Conservation Interest (ASCI) and to designate them at national level ;
- Many Parties which have benefited from biogeographical evaluations did not address the conclusions and did not take steps to improve the sufficiency of their list of sites and/or did not engage in the further development of the list of sites.

While this assessment is aimed to trigger more commitment and efforts from Contracting Parties it shows also where priorities could lie for the post-2020 Emerald Network agenda.

Contracting Parties reaffirmed their commitment to achieve the objectives of the Emerald Network calendar.

7. Future work of the Group of Experts

7.a Programme of activities 2019

The Secretariat presented proposals for the Programme of activities in 2019.

On-going discussions with the European Environment Agency could result in an extension of the cooperation agreement in 2019 to further support the Emerald Network in the Eastern Partnership. Subject to reaching an agreement two biogeographical evaluation seminars for the six Eastern Partnership countries to complete the second round of evaluation could be scheduled.

It was planned to have a joint meeting of the Groups of Experts on Climate Change and on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks in 2018. It was decided to postpone the organisation of a joint meeting to 2019 meanwhile the Secretariat has launched a consultation aimed at assessing gaps and needs in implementing climate adaptive management in protected areas at Pan-European level. Contracting Parties are expected to reply by 15 October to a questionnaire which should help identify the challenges faced in the implementation of climate change adaptive management. The joint meeting of both Groups of Experts would focus on defining positive responses to the challenges identified.

The reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012) will begin early 2019 and end in December 2019. The Secretariat will be mobilized to assist Parties in this first exercise. There is still some documentation which should be finalised and made available from the Reporting Reference Portal. The Secretariat is also discussing with the EEA the feasibility of a third training workshop organised within the framework of the cooperation agreement between both Organisations. It would be planned at the end of the first semester 2019 and aim to take stock of the reporting progress in the countries and to discuss possible difficulties arisen.

The Group of Experts agreed on the proposed activities for 2019.

7.b Date and place of the next meeting of the Group of Experts

2019 will mark the 40th anniversary of the Bern Convention and the Secretariat would welcome if a Party would host the 10th meeting of the Group of Experts which will take place end of September – beginning of October 2019.

8. Election of the Chair and Vice-Chair

Interested Parties were invited to manifest their interest and propose candidates for the positions of Chair and vice-Chair of the Group of Experts as from 2019. The Secretariat received the candidatures from Norway for chairing the Group and from Ukraine for the position of vice-Chair.

Both Mr Tore Opdahl (Norway) and Ms Anastasiia Drapaliuk (Ukraine) were unanimously elected for a mandate of four years.

The Group of Experts elected Mr Tore Opdahl as Chair and Mrs Anastasiia Drapaliuk as Vice-Chair of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks as from 2019 and for four years.

9. Any other business

No other issues were raised.

10. Conclusions of the meeting

The Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks agreed to submit to the 38th Standing Committee to the Bern Convention for formal approval the following decisions:

- The amendment of Resolution No. 4 (1996) so as to include the complex habitat *Depressions (pody) of the Steppe zone* and on the revision of the interpretation manual of habitats so as to encompass the description of *Pistacia mutica woodland, Mud volcanoes and Pine forests on chalk* (for the later subject to the outcomes of the discussions between the representatives of the Russian Federation and Ukraine).
- The amendment of Resolution No. 4 (1996) so as to include the habitats *C3.2 Water fringing reedbeds and tall helophytes other than canes* and *G1.41 Alnus Swamp Woods not on acid peat* proposed by Switzerland in 2014.
- The agreement on the proposed map of marine regions (subject to Iceland's and Norway's further comments until 19 October).
- The agreement on the guidance document on the Ecological Character of Emerald Network sites and the attached recommendations:
 - The guidance should be tested by Ukraine on a case file relating to the Emerald Network;
 - National experts should provide feedback on the extent to which the guidelines can be put into practice;
 - The Bureau of the Standing Committee should assess the relevance of the guidance when examining a sample of complaints/case files relating to the Emerald Network.

Annex 1: Agenda

		Documents	Expected results
<i>Thursday 4 October</i>			
9.00	1. Opening of the meeting		
	2. Adoption of the agenda	Meeting agenda T-PVS/Agenda(2018)6 For adoption	Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are informed of the aims of the meeting and adopt the agenda.
	3. Mandate of the Group and decisions of the 37th meeting of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention <i>Presentation by Iva Obretenova</i>	Report of the 8th meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks T-PVS/PA(2017)13 Report of the 2nd meeting of the Ad-hoc Restricted Group of Experts on Reporting on the Emerald Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest T-PVS/PA(2017)12 Extract from the list of decisions and adopted texts on the protection of habitats T-PVS/PA(2018)9 For information	The salient points of the 37 th meeting of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention are recalled.

	4. Reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012)		
	<p>4.a Reporting tool</p> <p><i>Presentation by Marc Roekaerts</i></p> <p><i>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are informed of the current state of development of the reporting tool.</i></p>	<p>Link to the EU's reporting tool for article 17</p> <p>For information</p>	<p>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are informed of the state of development of the reporting tool</p>
	<p>4.b Reporting Reference Portal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Revised reporting format ▪ Revised guidelines (part 1) ▪ Guidelines (part 2) ▪ Checklist for species ▪ Checklist for habitats ▪ Population units ▪ List of pressures and threats ▪ List of conservation measures ▪ Range tool <p><i>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are invited to discuss the working documents and to exchange views on possible follow up work.</i></p>	<p>Reporting format Guidelines (part 1) – T-PVS/PA(2017)17 Draft guidelines (part 2) – T-PVS/PA(2018)10 Draft checklist for species Draft checklist for habitats Draft proposal of population units List of pressures and threats List of conservation measures Link to the range tool</p> <p>Link to the new Reference Portal for the reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012)</p> <p>For discussion and decision</p>	<p>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts agree on the supporting documents to the reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012) which will be published on the Reporting Reference Portal.</p> <p>T-PVS/PA(2018)5</p>
	<p>4.c Emerald Network Reference Portal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ISO country codes ▪ Code lists for species ▪ Code lists for habitats ▪ Habitat classes 	<p>List of ISO country codes Code lists for species Code lists for habitats Habitat classes</p>	<p>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts agree on the supporting documents to the reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012) which will be published on the Emerald Network Reference Portal.</p> <p>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts agree on</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ List of national designation types ▪ Interpretation manual of the habitats listed in Resolution No. 4 (1996) ▪ Guidelines for filling in the SDF <p><i>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are invited to discuss the working documents and to exchange views on possible follow up work.</i></p>	<p>List of national designation types Interpretation manual of the habitats listed in Resolution No. 4 (1996) T-PVS/PA(2015)9</p> <p>Guidelines for filling in the SDF T-PVS/PA(2018)8</p> <p>Link to the new Emerald Network Reference Portal</p> <p>For discussion and decision</p>	<p>revising and updating their respective national designation of protected areas</p>
	<p>5. Development of the Emerald Network guidance</p>		
	<p>5.a Guidance describing the ecological character of Emerald Network sites</p> <p><i>Presentation by Dave Pritchard</i></p> <p><i>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are invited to discuss the working document and to exchange views on possible follow up work.</i></p>	<p>Guidance on detecting, reporting, assessing and responding to changes in the ecological character of Emerald Network sites. T-PVS/PA(2018)13</p> <p>Study on the “ecological character” of sites T-PVS/PA(2017)8</p> <p>For discussion and decision</p>	<p>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts agree on the development of a new Bern Convention guidance on detecting, assessing and responding to changes and likely changes in the ecological character of ASCIs.</p>
	<p>5.b Proposals of additional species to Resolution No. 6 (1998) and/or habitats to Resolution No. 4 (1996) and follow-up on previously proposed additional habitats to Resolution No. 4 (1996)</p> <p><i>Reminder by the Secretariat (Marc Hory)</i></p> <p><i>Presentation of the recommendations of the</i></p>	<p>Assessment by the European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity of the proposal of Ukraine to add 4 habitats to Resolution No. 4 (1996) T-PVS/PA(2018)7</p>	<p>The additional habitats proposed by Contracting Parties are agreed on and their inclusion in Resolution No. 4 (1996) is sent for adoption to the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention.</p>

	<p><i>ETC/BD by Marc Roekaerts</i></p> <p><i>Representatives of the Contracting Parties and Observer states are reminded that they should inform the Secretariat of the lists of species and habitats they propose for Resolution N° 6 (1998) and/or Resolution No. 4 (1996)</i></p> <p><i>Representatives of the Contracting Parties and Observer States are invited to discuss and to exchange views on the proposal of 4 habitats to be added to Resolution No. 4 (1996) in the light of the recommendations of the European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity (ETC/BD).</i></p>	<p>For discussion and decision</p>	
	<p>5.c Marine Regions</p> <p><i>Presentation by the Secretariat</i></p> <p><i>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are invited to discuss the working document and to exchange views on possible follow up work.</i></p>	<p>Draft proposal of Marine regions T-PVS/PA(2018)18</p> <p>For discussion and decision</p>	<p>The draft proposal of Marine Regions is agreed on by the members of and observers to the Group of Experts and sent for adoption by the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention.</p>
	<p>5.d Resources for the management of Natura 2000 sites</p> <p><i>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are informed the creation of a webpage bringing together Natura 2000 resources aimed to assist Parties to develop management schemes.</i></p>	<p>Link to the website</p> <p>For information</p>	<p>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are informed of the existence of these resources and can use them in the context of the Emerald Network.</p>
	<p>6. State of play of the Emerald Network and</p>		<p>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are</p>

	<p>future perspectives - Reports by Contracting Parties and list of Emerald Network candidate and adopted sites</p> <p><i>Presentation of the consolidated sufficiency conclusion by Marc Roekaerts</i></p> <p><i>Presentation of the progress of the sufficiency of the Emerald Network by Otars Opermanis</i></p> <p><i>Presentation of the state of implementation of the Emerald Network calendar by the Secretariat</i></p> <p><i>Representatives of the Contracting Parties and Observer states were invited to report in writing on the latest achievements in the setting up of the Emerald Network in their respective countries.</i></p> <p><i>Representatives of the Contracting Parties and Observer states are invited to confirm that all newly proposed sites from their latest national databases are to be sent for official nomination to the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention.</i></p> <p><i>Representatives of the Contracting Parties and Observer states are invited to inform the Secretariat whether their country is submitting its candidate Emerald sites for official adoption as Emerald sites by the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention.</i></p>	<p>Consolidated sufficiency conclusions following the 2017 and 2018 biogeographical evaluation seminars T-PVS/PA(2018)15 (excel version) / MS Access version</p> <p>Progress of the sufficiency of the Emerald Network T-PVS/PA(2018)11</p> <p>Progress in the enforcement of the Revised calendar for the implementation of the Emerald Network (2011-2020) T-PVS/PA(2018)12</p> <p>Reports by the countries on the progress and achievements in the implementation of the Emerald Network calendar 2011-2020 T-PVS/PA(2018)17</p>	<p>informed on progress in the setting-up of the Emerald Network in all Contracting Parties and Observer States concerned.</p> <p>Countries may request the official nomination of their newly proposed Emerald Network sites as candidate Emerald sites by the Standing Committee.</p> <p>Countries may request the official adoption as Emerald sites of their candidate sites by the Standing Committee.</p> <p>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are informed of the evolvement of the sufficiency of the Emerald Network and of the current state of implementation of the revised Emerald Network calendar.</p>
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	7. Future work of the Group of Experts		
	7.a Programme of activities 2019 <i>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are invited to propose and discuss new activities in 2019</i>	For discussion and decision	Priority activities are identified and will feed into the Programme of activity 2019 of the Bern Convention (subject to the availability of financial and human resources)
	7.b Date and place of the next meeting of the Group of Experts <i>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts wishing to host the next meeting of the Group of Experts are invited to inform the Secretariat.</i>	For decision	The provisional venue and dates of the next meeting are agreed on.
	8. Election of the Chair and Vice-Chair	For decision	
	9. Any other business		
	10. Conclusions of the meeting		
12.30	<i>Friday 5 October</i> End of the meeting		